

The character Philo (probably speaking Hume’s position) is skeptical of this proof of God. One criticism he makes concerns the justification for the description of the analog. What is the problem he identifies with it?

Philo is also not impressed by the analogy used in the argument:

*Every alteration of circumstances occasions a doubt concerning the event; and it requires new experiments to prove certainly that the new circumstances are of no moment or importance. A change in bulk, situation, arrangement, age, disposition of the air, or surrounding bodies—any of these particulars may be attended with the most unexpected consequences. And unless the objects be quite familiar to us, it is the highest temerity to expect with assurance, after any of these changes, an event similar to that which before fell under our observation.*

- Philo, from David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

What’s the problem, exactly?

Finally, Philo is also not impressed with the inference from the description of the target to the analog. What are some problems with this last move of the argument?

In the end, the teleological argument relies strongly on the idea that all goal-directed systems simply must be the product of intelligent design. This is a key premise in both Cleanthes’ argument and Aquinas’ fifth way. Next class we will see a version of the teleological argument by William Paley that attempts to directly address this issue.

## Introduction to Philosophy

### The Teleological Proof of God’s Existence

Both the ontological and cosmological proofs for God’s existence are deductive arguments. That is, both arguments adopt a mode of inference attempting to provide conclusive support for the claim that God exists. However, the ontological proof is *a priori*, meaning that it seeks to demonstrate God’s existence by appeal to reason alone. The cosmological argument, on the other hand, was *a posteriori*, seeking to demonstrate God’s existence by appeal to experience as well as reason.

During the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in England, many philosophers and theologians thought that they could rationally prove the existence of God by using non-deductive approaches. These thinkers believed that by looking at the particular features of the natural world—its regularity, its order, its precision, its beauty—one would inevitably be led to the conclusion that the world and all its contents are most likely the product of intelligent design. Since some intelligent being, this argument continues, most likely designed this world, such a designer must be God. Notice that this is indeed relying on non-deductive inferences by only suggesting that the world is *most likely* the product of intelligent design. Also keep in mind that this is an *a posteriori* argument: it justifies the existence of God by appealing to our various experiences of the natural world and its contents.

More recently, this form of argumentation has reappeared in a variety of contexts, normally under the rubric of the “argument from design”. Traditionally, however, it has been known as the teleological argument for God. Regardless of its name, this is probably the most common argument for God’s existence.

In order to better understand the teleological proof, we need to first understand some basic concepts driving it:

Goal-Directed System:

Teleological Explanation:

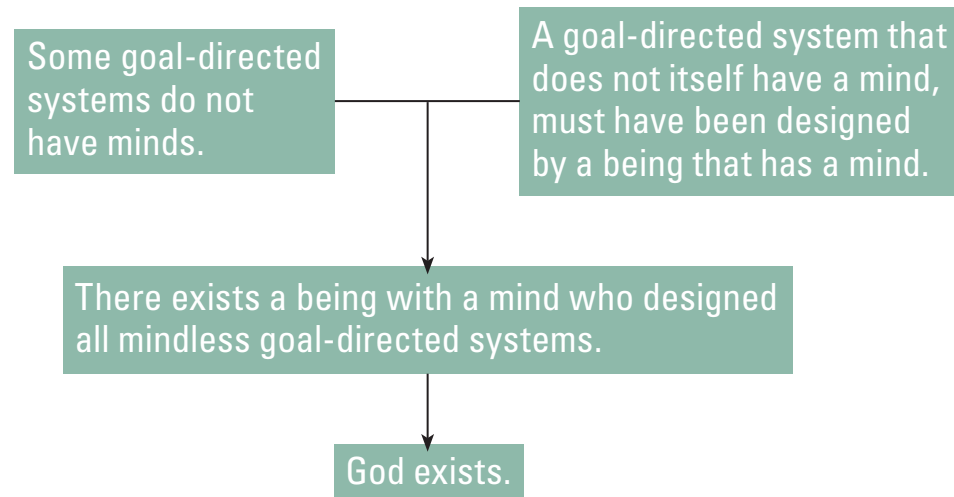
Imagine that you see a small girl eat an entire box of donuts. How would you explain her behavior?

Imagine that you see a basic robot (like the roomba) clean a room. How would you explain its behavior?

People and basic robots are obviously both goal-directed systems, but what makes them different?

Do we use teleological explanations to explain other things (besides people and their artifacts)?

The teleological proof derives its power from the idea that all goal-directed systems must be directly guided by, or at least have been the product of, intelligent design. This idea appears in Saint Thomas Aquinas' "Fifth Way" from his *Summa Theologica*, which can be diagrammed as follows:



Notice that Aquinas is trying a *deductive* form of the argument. This is actually rare. Most versions of this argument are actually non-deductive like the one presented by David Hume in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

David Hume (1711–1776 CE) was a renowned Scottish philosopher, and also very likely to have been an atheist. Hume never officially declared himself an atheist and his most hostile remarks about religion are never directly said by him; they are instead uttered by the character Philo in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Of course, had Hume been overtly hostile to religion, he most certainly would have suffered persecution. Indeed, it was most likely this fear that prevented him from publishing the *Dialogues* during his lifetime (they were published three years after his death by his nephew).

Regardless, in the *Dialogues*, the character Cleanthes believes that the existence of God can be demonstrated rationally by a pretty standard form of the teleological proof that was popular in England at the time:

*Look round the world: contemplate the whole and every part of it: you will find it to be **nothing but one great machine**, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions to a degree beyond what human senses and faculties can trace and explain. All these various machines, and even their most minute parts, are **adjusted to each other with an accuracy** which ravishes into admiration all men who have ever contemplated them. The curious adapting of means to ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly, though it much exceeds, the productions of human contrivance; of human designs, thought, wisdom, and intelligence. **Since, therefore, the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble; and that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man**, though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of the work which he has executed.*

- Cleanthes, from David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

This is an argument by analogy that is supposed to show that God exists. To begin with, what are the two things being compared, and how are they both alike?

Which is the analog and which is the target?

What property does the analog have, and how is it extended to the target?

Now use this to start putting together the diagram for Cleanthes' argument:

